

Bache
Eulogy
on
Hon. James Alfred Pearce

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EULOGY

HON. JAMES FRED PEARCE,

UNITED STATES SENATOR

ONE OF THE REGENTS OF THE

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.

PREPARED AT THE REQUEST OF THE BOARD

BY

PROF. ALEXANDER DALLAS BACHE, LL. D.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY J. J. COLEMAN.

JANUARY, 1865.

WASHINGTON.

PUBLISHED BY THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.

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E U L O G Y

ON

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HON. JAMES ALFRED PEARCE,

OF MARYLAND,

UNITED STATES SENATOR:

ONE OF THE REGENTS OF THE

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.

PREPARED AT THE REQUEST OF THE BOARD

BY

PROF. ALEXANDER DALLAS BACHE, LL. D.,

SUPERINTENDENT OF THE U. S. COAST SURVEY.

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1863

EXTRACT FROM THE PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

BOARD OF REGENTS OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.

At a meeting of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, held January 31, 1863, Professor Henry, the Secretary, announced the death of Hon. James A. Pearce, one of the Regents

Prof. Bache, after appropriate remarks, offered the following resolutions, which were unanimously adopted:—

Resolved, That the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution deeply mourn the loss of their distinguished fellow-regent, JAMES ALFRED PEARCE.

Resolved, That in the death of Mr. Pearce our country has lost a refined and influential citizen, the Senate of the United States an able, judicious, honest statesman, and this institution an active, intelligent, and learned Regent.

Resolved, That we sincerely condole with the afflicted family of Mr. Pearce, and offer to them our heartfelt sympathy in their great bereavement.

Resolved, That a copy of these resolutions be communicated by the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution to the family of the deceased.

On motion of Mr. Trumbull, it was—

Resolved, That Professor BACHE be requested to furnish a copy of his remarks in relation to Hon. James A. Pearce, for insertion in the journal of the Board of Regents.

EULOGY.

AGAIN has death invaded our circle, and taken from our councils and our active sympathies one of the most admirably gifted intellects which has at any time been called upon to form the character or direct the labors of the Smithsonian Institution. A member of the Executive Committee from nearly the second year of the organization under the act of Congress of 1846, attentive to every detail, whether scientific, administrative, or financial, Mr. PEARCE was always prompt at the call of every duty. His entire and cordial acquiescence in the form of organization adopted for the Institution, his liberal and zealous co-operation with the Board of Regents, his earnest support of, and unfaltering confidence in, the discretion and integrity of its Secretary, were as conspicuous as they were productive of the most lasting and important benefits. And though it is true that the general form and policy of the Institution were determined under the authority of Congress, by its first Board of Regents, yet it is quite as certain that strenuous action was afterwards needed to maintain

it in its adopted course, and secure it from projected innovations which, though strenuously advocated at the time, few now regard with aught but disfavor. To this end no one lent more effectual aid than our lamented colleague. Although, from taste and the conditions of his active life, he might more properly be styled a literary man, yet were his scientific attainments by no means inconsiderable, and a liberal and cultivated mind, which admitted of no narrow views, enabled him to embrace, in all its comprehensive simplicity, the idea of the generous foreigner who, in founding this Institution, consecrated his fortune to "the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men."

In whatever Mr. PEARCE engaged he exhibited the same spirit. Marked as a leader from his boyhood, at school as at college, in his profession as in the councils of the nation, in his neighborhood, his State, his country, as well as in the church with which he was connected, he stood distinguished for an enlightened estimate and an efficient support of whatever is elevated or calculated to elevate. Refined in his tastes, brilliant in society, instructive from the affluence of his ideas and extent of information, without ostentation, as without pretension, social, genial, even playful among his intimates—such was the associate whom we must long mourn, feeling that at the council board as in the familiar and friendly circle, we have lost one who strength-

ened us in our adhesion to what is right, good, or true, while ever prompt to lead us wherever progress held out rational hopes of improvement.

Generally, men of the temperament we have described are impatient of details; but this was not at all so with our departed friend. It afforded him pleasure to systematize and reduce to order even the dry details of finance, and a wonderful memory and a quick perception enabled him to pass them in rapid review with a scrutiny of every particular. His mental vision was as minute as comprehensive, and his analytical faculty never dismissed a subject of investigation until he was thoroughly satisfied with the arrangement, the method, the results: in a word, he was content with little less than the perfection of whatever occupied his attention or claimed his solicitude.

The objects which in Congress occupied most of his attention, and which it gave him most pleasure to defend and sustain, were those connected with literature and science, and in these he showed the same qualities which, as chairman of our Executive Committee, he has here so often exhibited. With the great interests of state, and the high objects of national politics he was abundantly qualified to grapple; in fact, he shrunk from no occasion in which to exert himself, when enlarged views and skilful powers of debate could be rendered serviceable to his country or the world. But if duty called upon

him from time to time for such efforts, still it was to objects promotive of art and science and high civilization, to means for man's moral and intellectual improvement, and for the enlargement of his knowledge and power over nature, that he turned with ever new and unwearied interest. To him probably more than to any other senator the library of Congress was indebted for the augmented fund which it has now for some years enjoyed, and for the care taken in the selection of the materials which render its shelves so useful. The Exploring Expedition was more than once indebted to his earnest and persistent efforts for the continuance of the means of publication of its results; the Coast Survey for expositions of its importance to the country and the world; the Smithsonian for warding off assaults, and reconciling enthusiastic but misguided opposition; the naval and military expeditions, boundary surveys, and explorations, for close, searching investigations, which led to important improvements and to cordial support. The great work of the extension of the Capitol found in him a wise advocate and judicious friend. Not afraid of what was new, he yet aimed at nothing for the sake of novelty. In connection with the decoration of the public buildings, our sculptors and painters found in him a most enlightened appreciator of their works, and one always ready to promote the cause of their art by legitimate means.

He had a remarkable power of attaching to himself men of science, literature, and art, and, in return, found in them some of his most intimate and highly-prized companionships. His friendships were warm, and once formed, were proof against all trials of absence or change of fortune. Many of his ardent attachments reverted to the friends and associates of his parents, and to family relations of even an older date, acquiring in his breast a more sacred title to cherished regard from the claims of the past.

The genial elements of his character naturally expanded most freely in the circle of his family and friends, where he was truly and ever at home. His garden, its fruits and flowers, were his habitual delight; his farm and its operations seemed to touch by association the springs of his deepest affections. He superintended every process with a judgment rarely at fault, and watched all the varied developments of nature with the interest of the amateur or the naturalist. Whoever had not seen Mr. PEARCE in his dwelling, in his garden, or upon his farm, knew him but imperfectly.

JAMES ALFRED PEARCE, the colleague, the counsellor, the friend, to whom we must now bid a final adieu, was born in the town of Alexandria, then part of the District of Columbia, December 14, 1805. His parents, who were of Scottish descent, and citizens of Maryland, dying during his childhood, the care of his education devolved upon his maternal

grandfather, the late Dr. Dick, of Alexandria, an eminent physician of that day, who will be remembered by the student of American history as having been one of the medical attendants who ministered at the dying bed of Washington. So rapid yet thorough was the progress of the young student in the rudimentary stages of education, that he graduated at Princeton College at the boyish age of seventeen, bearing away from competitors of no ordinary ability, and much subsequent distinction, the highest honors of his class. Having adopted the law as his profession, and permanently settled at Chestertown, Maryland, the former residence of his parents, he soon received the earnest of future success in the confidence, affection, and support of the community—a community to whose favor he might, indeed, already look forward in virtue of the memory of a meritorious and distinguished ancestry. His first step upon the more public stage, which was thenceforth to be the scene of his labors and success, was his unsolicited election to the legislature of Maryland, in 1831. From that day, with a single interval of two years, his talents and time were devoted to the service of his fellow-citizens in the halls of legislation, his career having led him, by a progression founded on the uncanvassed but ever-increasing confidence and respect of the people, through the House of Representatives to the Senate chamber, in which

he was fulfilling the unexpired term of a third election at the period of his death.

His characteristic qualities and tendencies as a legislator have been already slightly touched upon in this memorial, but whoever recalls the momentous events, the brilliant and important debates which, from 1835 to 1861, fixed the public attention, and excited the alternate hopes and fears of contending parties; whoever pictures to himself the majestic forms which then occupied the legislative arena, will remember that, through all these events, and measuring himself in no unequal competition with the foremost men of that earnest time, our colleague continued to advance steadily in public appreciation, to fill a yet wider and wider space in the eyes of the country, that on him rests no imputation of having ever purchased favor or advancement by a sacrifice of the slightest principle, or of having once deviated into any of those equivocal positions which sometimes bring disrepute on illustrious names; whoever shall recall and consider these things, will undoubtedly be qualified to form a more adequate and vivid conception of his labors and his worth than could be derived from any portraiture which this occasion would permit, or perhaps even the most labored eulogy could supply.

Nor were striking testimonials wanting to his peculiar and conspicuous merits: it rested but with himself to occupy positions of the highest public

distinction. A place in the cabinet and a seat in the federal judiciary were successively offered him; on more than one occasion his name was publicly canvassed in connection with the presidency of the United States. The former, however, he declined; the latter he steadily discountenanced. He seems to have felt that the Senate chamber was the proper sphere for his peculiar tastes and powers—a sphere equal to his well-regulated ambition, not below his admitted merit. The patronage incident to the executive branch of government involves much that would have been repugnant to his feelings; the judiciary has objections peculiar to itself in the ever-recurrent and monotonous nature of its functions; the representative department of Congress was for him too much influenced by the fluctuations of popular opinion. The Senate, in the stability of its tenure, and the variety of its discussions, in its character of a consultative and executive as well as legislative body, in the dignity and importance of its deliberations, involving the interests of States and the relations of national intercourse, seemed exactly fitted to give scope to his abilities, and to satisfy every aspiration he might indulge for usefulness or consideration. Perhaps it was in the committee-room of the Senate that his influence made itself more particularly felt, for here the extent of his information, the weight of his character, the directness and integrity of his purpose, his patience for details, his

familiarity with the forms of business, and aptitude in applying them with logical acuteness to the disentanglement of questions of fact and law, his co-operative spirit, his genial and companionable nature and manner, all conspired to give authority to his decisions, and to insure reliance and acquiescence on the part of those with whom he acted.

Had Mr. PEARCE not embraced the profession of law, he would doubtless, under suitable circumstances, have been celebrated as an agriculturist. Had he not given himself to political life, he could not have failed of eminence in science or in literature. It is indeed rare to meet with one whose capabilities and excellencies were so varied and so distinct, nor is it possible that, knowing him as I have done, I should speak of him otherwise than frankly and from the heart, though conscious of the imperfect representation which I have been able to give of a man so intrinsically great in all the elements which constitute true greatness, so entirely beloved for all that refers itself to the amenities of social intercourse and the sacred endearments of home.

In conclusion, it is proper to add that the peculiarities which marked his character during the active years of his life exhibited themselves in the closing period of his career under a new but harmonious aspect. Afflicted with an incurable malady, he contemplated his approaching end and endured his intense suffering with the unwavering faith and

resigned patience of a Christian. The religious principles which he had imbibed in childhood, and which had perhaps imperceptibly formed the basis of his character, became the dominant objects of his thoughts, and the consolation and happiness of his last hours.

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